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SUBJECT: French SPOT-4 Satellite's Near Miss of orbiting space debris

¶1. (U) On Tuesday, May 12, Embassy Paris was involved in establishing a link between the French National Center for Space Research ("CNES") Orbit determination Operational Centre (COO) and the U.S. Joint Space Operations Center (JSpOC) at Vandenberg Air Base concerning the possible collision of the French SPOT-4 earth imaging satellite and space debris. At 10 a.m. Paris time, the Environment, Science, Technology and Health (ESTH) Counselor was telephoned by the State Department Operations Center and informed of the possible collision. Working in concert with the NASA European Representative, and also the DOD European Space Liaison Officer, Richard McKinney ESTH Counselor contacted the appropriate official in CNES, who promptly asked for detailed information from JSpOC.

¶2. (U) Meanwhile, ESTH Counselor was also working with the State Department Bureau of International Security and Non-Proliferation (ISN) to grant "DIRLAUTH" (direct liaison authorization) between JSpOC and CNES so CNES could obtain the details it needed. Eventually, DIRLAUTH was granted, and JSpOC talked directly to CNES. The good news is that the collision did not take place, and SPOT-4 is still imaging earth.

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: Embassy was pleased to be able to assist in facilitating communication between CNES and JSpOC. Given the extent of French space activity, and the inevitable time delays in diplomatic communication channels, we recommend that JSpOC should have an ongoing channel for direct communication with CNES. JSpOC might also consider similar channels of communication for Germany and Italy.

Pekala